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LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE LORD MAYOR,

ON THE SUBJECT OF

GENERAL MEDICAL RELIEF,

TO THE

DISEASED POOR

OF THE

CITY OF LONDON.

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1809.



A

LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE

RT. HON. THE LORD MAYOR,

&c. &c.

MY LORD,

IT may seem presumptuous in me, a very young man, and unaccustomed to take the guage and dimensions of human suffering, that, with so feeble a voice as mine, I should address your Lordship upon a subject with the details of which I may not be perfectly conversant. If I do not possess experience, and an acquaintance with facts, to which superior opportunity has conducted

others, I am not less sensible of the extent and variety of that suffering, nor less solicitous about the means of relief; an acknowledgement of the slender powers of a most laudable institution, over which your Lordship now presides, might have rendered it my duty, as well as inclination, to represent its inadequacy to what might be, I conceive, a great and permanent object. Whatever I have seen, has served only to lead me on to more extensive views. I anticipate the desire of our zealous guardians of the poor, to request a more general attention to an institution so beneficial in its purpose, believing, that I should begin more closely to serve the great object we all have in view, viz. the general relief of all the diseased poor of our city, by submitting, in the first place, that we ought to describe and embrace our whole, before we proceed to extend and to arrange the parts; that we should meliorate and amplify in

subservience to some general and fixed design. Resolving to administer to all the sick poor of all this city, we ought to render an institution proportionate to this great and noble end, and, therefore, competent to the due exhaustion of every case ; taking this view, and finding what is reserved for the present age to complete, we shall be led to a persuasion of the necessity of extension in the means of such establishments, unless, indeed, it be discovered that they are radically defective.

Taking the mass of poor within these limits, we comprehend a wide portion of calamity and suffering. Disease stands foremost in the catalogue of woe, and, of itself, is so fertile a source of the affliction our nature is heir to, as to form the most prominent feature of the ills of mortality—it is one that attaches a more than common interest, as it forms the preliminary to our dissolution.—Disease, snatches the

artisan from the bosom of a dependent family, and the service of his employer.—Our crowded alleys and obscure lodgings, where misery, in all its forms, is heightened and disordered by impurity, are the sad abodes of distemper, unheard of and unknown to many.

Poor naked wretches, whoso'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you,
From seasons such as these ! O ! I have ta'en
Too little care of this ! take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
And shew the heav'ns more just.

SHAKESPEARE.

Here the manufacturer plies his loom with exhausting labour—here the mechanic, debarred from the common use almost of his own limbs, suffers an imperceptible decay—and then a family, passing a stinted youth in preparation for

some sickly trade in manhood— These are objects whose relaxed fibres and debilitated habits give a readier access to disease, and invite the contagion that generates around them. In such cases, it requires all the aid of medicine to suscite and restore; but their diet and habits of life unfortunately add to the complicated measure of ill, and all the sagacity and skill of the physician is necessary to avert the progress of a baffling enemy. Without all the comforts, and possessed of only a scanty share of the common necessities of life, their health at best stands on a very slender basis; they are pre-disposed to disease, and being subject to a variety of their immediate causes, they suffer a number both of general and local maladies.

“ The labouring people are certainly exposed to many casualties, from which the higher orders of society are shielded :—to damps and cold, contracted by working in wet weather ;

by the want of a change of raiment, deficient bed clothes, cold rooms, hurts, wounds, and other accidents, peculiar to their situation as out-door labourers, and, therefore, they require medical and surgical assistance more frequently than others, whose occupations expose them less to the inclemency of the weather. In disposing, therefore, of their labour, (their only stock in trade) they are not on a footing with other classes of the community, since they are liable to contract various diseases, and often suffer much from want of proper medical assistance, and other necessary comforts, which those of a higher rank enjoy. Nothing can exceed, on many occasions, the sufferings of this useful class, upon which the strength, stamina, and riches, of the country depend.”—A treatise on indigence, &c. by P. COLQUHOUN, Esq. LL.D.

On a subject of this nature, involving mat-

ters which ought to be decided by the calm and temperate dictates of enlightened wisdom, it is by no means a desire of mine, with a view to engage the feelings, to pourtray such scenes any farther than a just attention to their import seems to demand—it is with an impression only of what is due towards a just appreciation, and as accurate a survey as possible, that I insist on this topic :—there is a sensibility to what is to be admitted, by no means incompatible with the most rigid deduction, It is but proper to believe,

“ How many feel, this very moment, death,
And all the sad variety of pain.
How many pine in want, and dungeon glooms,
Shut from the common air, and common use
Of their own limbs.”

THOMSON.

I cannot offer any precise data, as a numerical summary of the facts which give colouring to our representation ; it may be sufficient

to assume, that there is a great body of poor in this city, incident to all the diseases common to the human frame, and to those also which are multiplied in great cities.

To the philanthropist, who views, with benignant anxiety, the condition of the whole human race, who loves to mark the links of that chain which unites us all in one plan as working together for good, it will be a matter of solicitude, to observe the system of relief applied to this body of disease ; and he will be peculiarly anxious to place it upon that footing which shall appear, upon investigation, to be most conducive to the welfare of the industrious poor.

The propriety of omitting all warmth and prejudice on this, as well as every other question, must be obvious, and particularly here, when it is considered, that fixed and opposite interests are involved in the decision, and that to those interests are attached the merit and

expectation of their supporters. Seeing then, this mass of diseased objects, and anxious that a rational and combined plan should be brought to bear upon it, in the most efficacious way of relief, we are led to examine, impartially, how this relief might be administered, in a manner the most consistent with comprehensiveness of arrangement, excellence of treatment, and the strictest economy. Shall we leave the sub-divisions of medical labour to operate alone, and, abandoning the idea of any public institution, leave professional exertion to find its level, and to answer the demand? However just the philosophical principle, it is undoubted that public institutions, affording a dispensation of relief to all the diseased poor who require it, are most political in every point of view; nor do we renounce the principle here, it is rather illustrated and confirmed; for, to obtain a clear and decided preference it must be deserved; we

act in strict conformity to the soundest wisdom in proposing a competition, and encouraging men to start with the hope of preference, but not with the patent of monopoly. In such a competition, the public establishment would far exceed, if properly conducted, the present rivalry of inferior practice, and the very fact of its pre-eminence would not only furnish the best panegyric on the enlightened views of its founders, but give, also, the surest pledge of intrinsic merit in the principle. The superiority of the relief held out would be sufficient to secure the acceptance and the gratitude of the poor. Dispensaries combine all the advantages of professional attendance, even at the house of the patient; superior skill, and gratuitous humanity to the poor, with the unity of a combined plan, simple and uniform in its effects; but it would require a dispensary of more extended powers, than any we are allowed to possess at present, to be suf-

ficiently comprehensive, and in every respect desirable ; it would require the vigilance of trustees to the diseased poor, to supersede the baneful practice that is pursued on all sides, by a strict recommendation of their excelling benefits. Much injury arises from the interposition of the half-instructed uninformed multitude, who follow up the medical trade ; men, who, without any regular pretensions to the practice of physic, obtrude their claims, of which the ignorant cannot judge, and produce incalculable mischief among the lower orders. The records of the City Dispensary furnish repeated proofs of the full existence of this abuse, aggravated and heightened as it is by the extortions that accompany it. To comply with the encreasing demands of these persons, a distressed family must, in all probability, forego some invigorating meal, and to defray the expence of a protracted attendance, or of ineffec-

tual drugs, deny that to the patient which is essential to his comfort; that this is correct in many instances, might be easily established; that there are both humanity and skill to be found in others is well known; yet, in a matter of so nice and anxious interest, we must not be content to risk any thing, but rather, by a due exhaustion of the cases of a district, by an appointed institution, obviate any farther doubt, and supersede an uncertainty so suspicious. Considering the motives that spring in the breast of the dispensary physician, we must attribute the greatest humanity to his endeavours, and those benevolent views which may be supposed to influence one anxious to fulfil the great wishes of his patrons. The position of the propriety of a public institution, which I have affirmed rather than attempted to establish, seems to be generally admitted—it is called for by the wants of the diseased, it is justified by every

principle of sound policy.—The next enquiry is,

1st. How we shall apportion these establishments to particular districts, so as to exhaust the cases of those districts; and 2dly, How to settle a more minute division, and assign peculiar receptacles to peculiar characters of disease.

If I might be allowed to glance at a general arrangement which I could wish to see carried into execution, and it is a subordinate part that we now entertain, I would submit, whether, taking the medical as well as general relief of the poor into the hands of the rich, it would not be adviseable to canton out all England into particular districts, the limits of which might be determined either by parishes, or lines of demarcation, to be hereafter settled? In these districts, accurately defined, a public establishment for the relief of the diseased poor might be founded, to which every applicant

within his district, might be admitted, on the recommendation of the churchwarden or overseers ; which would ensure an acknowledged refuge, and tend to divert the exertions of minor practitioners, which ought to be superseded, into a more useful employment of their talents, for the benefit of the community. Nor can this, I apprehend, be ungrateful to those gentlemen whose department it has been to attend the poor; they will observe a connected plan to arise, embracing those parts, which their own experience has shewn to be inadequately provided for, and that, instead of their emoluments being split among several rivals, and discredit thrown upon their exertions by the imposition of some, a few gentlemen would be elected to attend specially to that department, with a salary becoming the respectability of their endowments. No man, however swayed by interest, can withhold his

approbation, that the business of administering to the diseased poor, should be transferred from the incapable to the hands of an approved physician. To appropriate relief to particular districts would not be difficult ; it must be our care to render that measure of relief sufficiently comprehensive and easy of application.

With respect to the second question that arose, viz. how to settle a more minute division, and to establish those different asylums which different characters of disease require, it may be sufficient to observe, that the outline should be first described, and a general provision made, somewhat for the same reason that, in the cultivation of an extensive country, forests must be cleared, and a general cultivation begun, before the limits of private property are fixed with accuracy ; and long before the period, when the divisions and sub-divisions of separate possession, give rise to the details of a curious

and refined husbandry ; the propriety of particular receptacles may be considered, after a general dispensation has been fixed, by means of the proposed establishments :—this, as it admits of by far the most unlimited application, so the want of the few aids, which it does not fall within its province to grant, is comparatively very small, and in most cases sufficiently provided for.

Applying then the foregoing conclusions on these two heads, to the case of the city of London, 1st, we may place it within a compass of which London, properly so called, is the whole, because that seems the most natural and obvious partition under which we range ourselves, denoted, as it is pre-eminently, by a confessed distinction, and, we may consider it as a fixed and separate district, as there is a jurisdiction peculiar to this city, that seems particularly to direct and concentrate its cognizance to every liberal

and enlightened measure that belongs to it. The pursuance of our object in this district, which is not vague or diffuse, appears a matter of immediate interest to every inhabitant of this city, and happily much of the difficulty is removed, the way is described and prepared, and it is necessary only to improve and to extend it. In the City Dispensary we have a foundation on which to construct the fabric, the elements on which to rear a permanent and extensive system. This meritorious institution, however, is but little known, and like the silent unobserved ways of the good man, has performed its actions through good report and evil report, with only the consciousness and the hope of doing good. The benevolent views of its founders were, perhaps, sufficiently extensive at the time in which they lived, but we shall, I think, be led to perceive that the pious work of their hands, remains to be asserted farther, and, that

it is easy as well as incumbent, where it is lost, to raise and support. It must not be forgotten that the liberal assistance of many charitable and eminent persons of this city, and others, has not been wanting for a series of years, and that the chief magistrates, successively, have assumed the immediate guardianship of this institution. The Corporation of the City of London, ever distinguished for its liberality, has voted a considerable sum in aid of its funds, which, together with the repeated opinions of respectable members of that body, has conferred a sanction upon the plan which no remark can fortify. That this dispensary, however, in its present state of protracted infancy, is inadequate to our design, is a most lamentable fact, and unless some mode of furnishing it with more extensive powers is devised, it can never go far beyond the gratuitous relief of some patients, through the humanity of some go-

vernors. We see the necessity of extension in this dispensary, in the quantity of diseased objects who seek any kind of relief, and if they do not implore it here, it is because they know not where to find it.

2dly. Being already provided with a London Hospital, worthy in every respect of the generosity of its supporters, with infirmaries for the cure of many distinct maladies, and with other institutions, admirably adapted to relieve or to sooth the indigent, under the pressure of various characters of disease ; we may at present confine ourselves to a view of the relation in which the City Dispensary, properly enlarged, would stand to them.

Whilst all other institutions profess particular relief, it is the object of a Dispensary to dispense general relief, and it occupies a most necessary ground. An hospital should confine, as accurately as possible, its administration to

all those cases which require attendance of a special kind, and which cannot be left in the midst of a family, especially those of serious accidents—of malignant fever, and all contagious affection—cases where a distinct receptacle is necessary.

A Dispensary, by its constitution, concerns only those wherein the patient remaining with his family, attends at the dispensary, or is visited at his own house. When the poor sufferer is separated from his dearest friends in the hour of danger and distress, it may, in some cases, tend a little to increase his malady, but he may, notwithstanding, be judged a fit object for an hospital ; when no particular cause for removal to an hospital occurs, and happily, the patient is retained in the bosom of his family, medical treatment is combined with the kind and affectionate offices of relatives and friends. It is stated, in a document of the City Dispensary, that “ the many hospitals in this

metropolis, highly conducive as they are to the comfort and advantage of those who enjoy their benefits, are insufficient to afford relief to one-sixth part of the diseased poor of this great city, their admissions being but once a week; and are attended, in numberless instances, with insurmountable difficulties." Taking the estimate of the number of patients admitted to the hospitals, at one-sixth part of the whole diseased, can we believe that the remaining five-sixths are relieved, as we desire to see, by a dispensary? The question, it is true, cannot be separated, for no doubt, many are obliged to have recourse to dispensaries, who ought to be selected as fitter objects for an hospital, and vice versâ; but this only argues for an extension of the dispensing plan, that it may at least embrace the whole of the five sixths that remain, and supply, when the hospital, however excellent in itself, is necessarily confined. Can it be assured to the humane

public, that dispensaries already effect so desirable an end? I apprehend we should be forced to acknowledge, balancing the number actually occupied by dispensaries, with the five-sixths whom it is desirable to occupy, that a considerable deficiency remains, without their reach, exposed to all the chance of neglect, or of questionable administration.

There are many instances of slight ailment, which daily occur to our manufacturers and servants, and are easily removed, with little aid, by the disinterested medical gentlemen, attached to such institutions. The remedies are prescribed and granted at no expence, such as we have seen pressed upon the poor man, and the employer is certain, that as little delay as possible will suspend those services which, with difficulty he must spare. A Dispensary fills up the general void, it has an immediate concern for every applicant, labouring under every spe-

cies of disease, whether of short or protracted duration.

If such an institution deserve support—if the great objects to which it professes to be directed, ought to be embraced, it follows that being now incompetent, the measure of that support must be extended, extended by giving it the sanction of a public fiat, establishing it as a public institution, maintained, as I shall hereafter shew, at the public expence. Many advantages would flow from such a scheme. A proper medical police might be engrafted on a combined general plan of this nature ; looking at the present state of divided practice, feeble and unsupported as it is, we cannot rely, that when even the safety of a family is concerned, an individual practitioner would dare to lift his voice against a neighbouring manufactory, the sole cause perhaps of their disease. A respect is due to the voice of a public institution, whose

care it is to watch over the health of the distressed community, and who, in fact, constituting a board for that purpose, ought to interpose. This is a lateral branch of the subject deserving of some attention. I recollect to have heard of a case when at college, which impressed my mind, at that time, with the necessity of a public institution of such extended powers. In a city, remarkable for the purity of the breezes that open from the neighbouring Firth, a poor family, numerous and confined, were seized with a malignant fever; it attacked them successively, and with the most alarming symptoms, nor could it be subdued for a considerable time, by all the endeavours of an able and humane physician, who asserted to me, that the sole cause of the distemper was the vicinity of the hovel to a slaughter house, the putrid refuse of which gave rise to the most noxious infection. In Edinburgh the

principal slaughter house, which is a sort of general depôt, is situated in part of a plain, distinct from any habitation, and surrounded by high walls. In our city, slaughter houses may be found in almost every crowded entrance that adjoins the butcher's shop ; it is not meant to convey any objection to the neighbourhood of slaughter-houses, which, if kept in a state of cleanliness, cannot be prejudicial ; but, if neglected, they ought to be protested against with all the promptitude and all the authority of a board of health, which cannot be expected from any individual.

It was placed beyond a doubt, by the result of the investigation of Mess^{rs}. GUYTON-MORVEAU, and CHAPTAL, of the physical class of the National Institute, that there are trades, particularly those in which a great mass of animal or vegetable matter is heaped up to rot or putrify, more or less hostile to the welfare of an ad-

joining neighbourhood, and, in their report, may be found many accurate distinctions between the various kinds of public nuisance.* A consideration of the proximity of the labouring classes in this city to many probable sources of distemper, and of the bad effects that may attend it, unless a vigilant administration is constituted, would claim, in a direct point of view, some attention at least, to the fundamental principles of the condition of the poor. It would be one of the advantages of a public institution to conduct enquiries into such subjects with every reasonable expectation of success, for, by them, every object would be the more attainable, and their opinions are entitled to great

* Rapport demandé à la classe des sciences physiques et mathématiques de l'institut, sur la question de savoir si les manufactures qui exhalent une odeur désagréable peuvent être nuisibles à la santé.—*ANNALES DE CHIMIE*, Vol. liv. p. 86, for April 1805.

respect. There is an unity and authority in a combined plan, that ensures effect, and leads to great and unforeseen improvements.

With respect to the plan of extending the institution, which, to attain our great object, has been resolved to be necessary, we must, in the first place. entitle ourselves to the praise of comprehensiveness, we must render our means sufficient to embrace every patient, whose case ought to be entertained by us, we must be easy of access, and attentive to every claim. It should be professed then, and the assurance of it circulated among the poor, that every indigent person residing within the limits of the city of London, will receive, gratuitously, the best medical relief assigned, on producing at the house of the City Dispensary, a proper certificate, signed by an officer of the parish in which he dwells. The nature of the advantages offered might be explained by the re-

spective overseers of each parish, whose duty, I conceive it is, or might be, to watch over the health as well as general condition of the poor. In order to dispense relief as readily and conveniently as possible, and it is of importance, on many accounts, not to be remote from any point in the circumference, we must take care to place the house of the institution as centrally as possible. But if it should be found, on filling up this outline, hastily sketched, that one establishment, placed as closely as circumstances would allow, to the Royal Exchange, as a centre, would be too remote from some parts of the city, or even too confined, we might, instead of proposing to consolidate with our institution, one or more excellent dispensaries that now pursue a separate practice, desire to arrange with them in such manner, that in conjunction, and with a change of location,

each might administer better to a respective division.

With all the advantages then which I have cursorily alluded to, and many are yet unforeseen, we should commence an extensive, unconfined, and ready system of relief throughout this city.

Placing superior benefits within the immediate reach of the poor man, at no expence to himself, there is secured to him a refuge of the most unexceptionable nature that can be pointed out, and his preference of it must give the most direct proof of its validity. Those who now languish on the bed of sickness, in painful doubt and uncertainty of relief, will hear our glad tidings with new hope; and many, when our welcoming voice is acknowledged, have yet to bring their tale of misery, the extent of which is now little suspected.

In order to consult, to the utmost, the best interests of the poor, we must take care to pro-

vide the best medical advice, and drugs of the first quality. When the Governors of the City Dispensary enacted, that every candidate for the office of physician to their institution, must be a member of the Royal College of Physicians; and, that every candidate for the office of surgeon to the same, must be a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, they had a view to the best relief they could procure for the patient. The patrons of our increased establishment, in attending to this, would, no doubt, secure in the object of their choice, the most eminent ability and reputation; the choice might be vested in a committee appointed to direct the affairs of the institution, composed, perhaps, of the principal members of the corporation, the representatives of this city in parliament, and of some fellows of the Royal Society, of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and of Surgeons, and eminent practitioners,

who, with the medical officers, might form the Board of Health, to report to the General Committee.

With respect to the medical officers of an institution, judging, from past experience of the shameful neglect that has sometimes prevailed in attendance on the poor, in hospitals particularly, I would propose that the medical gentlemen should be elected annually, and that they be not allowed to pursue any private practice ; that they should reside in the house, devoting their undivided time and attention to the patients abroad and at home, at fixed hours, and, perhaps, giving, in the winter evenings, a course of clinical lectures. That there has been neglect prevalent in hospitals, is undeniable ; it is well known to every student with what careless rapidity the wards are sometimes passed by, once in the day, scarcely allowing time for a question to escape about the

condition of the lingering patient, who is often shocked at the indifference he experiences. It is much to be lamented too, that it is not unfrequently the case, when an operation has been appointed by the surgeon himself, the hour fixed, and the patient, with what anxious suspense! prepared, the appointment has been totally forgotten, the patient exhausted, and perhaps become, after a short delay, unable to undergo what it is dangerous to protract.

Evidence to this effect, which I could establish, would seem to justify the hints I suggested above.

But, what a model must the neglect I adverted to, present to the imitative principle in the minds of attentive youth!—they, who are entrusted with the care of the lives and safety of the community, with the preservation of the poor, and the health and restoration of our daring seamen, and of an undaunted soldiery.

That those, to whom is committed the care of the precious blood of Britain, should have acquired habits of negligence or indifference, from early association, in the hospital where they were bred, is a most painful thought. But whence that general indifference, that rapid independence, that aversion to enquiry, often the symptom of ignorance, of which many may be accused, when even they go forth into the world? May it not be attributed to their being early familiarized to the ways of an hospital, where the medical gentlemen, eminent as they are, have a private practice, and consequently devote little time for the due performance of their public duties?—There are many and great exceptions to this, but, when we believe that it is commonly the case, we should be careful not to give countenance to the principle in our regulations for a new institution.

I would urge some objection to the plan of

general ballot, as applied to an election of this nature. It appears to me to encourage great party spirit, and to foster all that variety of emotion and of feeling in the breasts, not only of candidates, but their supporters, which is much to be deprecated. The consequences have been seen and felt by even the moderate part of every community placed within its sphere of operation. As in a commonwealth, the passions, and interests, and feelings of the people are appealed to, and crossed by every candidate for public favor, which, unhappily, must be the first step to private success; so, within a smaller, but like circle, when there is a hope to influence the minds of men, and to engage a party who cannot judge, to abide by our own judgment, there will always be an appeal from the reason of a few to the feeling of the many.—Can it be expected that persons occupied in the pursuit of their respective confined trades, ought to be the arbiters on a doubt-

ful point ; that they can decide, with reasoning, upon the nice and accurate distinctions of human character and qualification, that they will not be open to many floating impressions, and liable to be influenced by casual opinions expressed on a canvas, and the bias of interest and attachment ? Whenever there is a hope of inducing such persons to promote our own views, however unsupported by great and eminent endowments, the experiment will, by some or other, be attempted. To a medical gentleman, unknown and of unobtrusive merit, it must be painful to depend on the success of a cabal, and to submit his claims, which he foresees, may be overlooked, and perhaps not understood. But there is a satisfaction in resting one's cause before a few select enlightened individuals, which I have endeavoured to meet, in proposing a committee, in whom the right of election is to be vested, constituted as I have

before detailed—there is a respect due to the wisdom of such a body, which represses the officiousness of interested individuals, and their superior judgment ensures the acknowledgement of those candidates only who are most likely to promote the real and substantial interests of the institution.

In order to obtain a supply of the best drugs, at the least expence, we must not have recourse to the vender, or to the wholesale dealer, but, as large stores would be necessary, the most eligible mode would be by importation, which would furnish the institution in the greatest perfection and at little cost. The public expenditure, should, for obvious reasons, be conducted with the greatest economy, while, at the same time, it procures the best objects.

It only remains essential to my plan that I treat of the subject of funds.

One of the chief causes of the present limited

operation of the City Dispensary, is to be found in the measure of its funds, but, still more in this, that the admission of the poor is so interwoven with the thread of subscription, as to be fettered and confined by it.

It will be necessary, in order to explain these points, that I detail the custom to which I allude. The funds arise from the following sources, viz. annual subscription, which constitutes the subscriber an annual governor so long as the subscription of one guinea is renewed, with the privilege of having two patients on the books, recommended by him for relief; life subscription, which entitles to the same privilege, on a direct payment of ten guineas; and the contributions obtained at the anniversary dinner, charity sermons, &c. It rests then with the governors, whether annual or for life, to admit the patients, and it is very certain that many are never applied to for the relief they might

procure, nor, if they admit some, does it frequently extend beyond a few. It is true that the humanity of the officers of the dispensary frequently induces them, when they hear of a case that requires their aid, to direct the patient to some governor, who can give him a letter of recommendation ; but the freedom of admission is still hampered, and even when in full exercise by every governor, is confined by the number of those governors however limited.

Such a number cannot at least be set off with advantage against the average number of sick who ought to be admitted. I cannot help thinking, from past experience, that the supply of funds, on the ground of voluntary subscription to such an institution, is precarious, because, when the exertions and zeal of a chief supporter are removed, it may fall almost into neglect and disuse.

It might be invidious to attempt to define

with precision, the limits that should obtain in regulating the province of a spontaneous generosity, and that of a positive obligation on the body politic. Where necessity is publicly seen and decidedly felt, which is rare indeed, we may hope for as much, and perhaps more, in the unlimited channels of the former, than in the cold calculations of the latter; but it has already been seen, that we ought not to abide entirely by the one, nor, quitting this, should we restrict ourselves to the provision afforded by the other. We must request a voluntary and liberal subscription for a commodious building to carry into effect the great purposes of our plan, the present being wholly unfit for the purpose; and, to defray the current expences, salaries of the medical officers, drugs, &c. we must look to an annual supply. On the completion of the building, it will, for these purposes, be sufficient to have recourse only to a

moderate tax delicately imposed. We might levy a small increase of the overseers' tax, in the shape of an assessment, as an extraordinary in the poors' rate, and, perhaps, on a scrutiny into the appropriation of the present heavy rate, something might be spared to diminish the wants of the institution.

The voluntary subscription is of course to be considered a distinct temporary measure, to be appropriated to the specific purpose of building, and the tax alone will be afterwards resorted to. The propriety of having recourse to a moderate tax is, I think, conspicuous. We cannot apprehend any of the pernicious effects which attend a tax levied for the ordinary support of the poor, and to which they plead a title. It may be said of indefinite charities, nourished by such a source, that they increase the number of poor, as well as their distresses, and while spreading idleness and immorality around, they

subject the community to the most grievous exactions ; but the necessity of these exactions must spring from the influx of poverty, which the fund has indirectly encouraged, and the accumulated quantity of labour, I may venture to say, which it has bought up. As we cannot attract any more to us than the actual number of sick, all of which we are bound to relieve, but cannot thereby multiply, it is plain that we form a very definite charity. If we encrease progressively our number of patients, it is because we become better known, and obtain that laudable preference for which we strive. The superiority of our system being felt and acknowledged, we shall be applied to from every quarter of this extensive city, and we may then hope to attain our end, but never fear to overstep it ; we may advance to a great extent, which we desire to see, but as we cannot encourage sickness, we shall not lengthen as we

proceed. We cannot multiply beyond that limit we propose, and it is reasonable to hope, that among future excellencies, now undiscovered or dimly seen, there will be caused a sensible diminution in the quantity of disease.

It is not just moreover, it is not politic, that a system of such extensive utility, should be supported by the liberality of a few, by a connexion, as it almost appears, of respectable individuals, to whose influence with their friends, the institution is chiefly indebted for its support: it is not fitting, that a plan which requires the concurring support of all, should be sustained only by the exertions of a few. We ought to look, in this matter, to an adjustment of means, and settle the channels of benevolence, that the stream of charity may flow uninterrupted, and dispense fertility in due proportion to every region that is watered in its course. In proposing to levy in this manner,

what it is only proper to require, there is particular consideration given to what is due to other institutions, as well as to ourselves; there is a view to some happier arrangement of the general portion set aside for charitable purposes by the community, which it might be thought speculative to anticipate, and which time only and practical wisdom can realize. The simple operation of the mode proposed will shew, that in calling upon new energies in one way, we spare others to be otherwise applied. We require of every one blessed with moderate competence, whose duty it is to contribute to the relief of the diseased poor, that pittance which he can well spare, and render back to those who would contribute largely, a superflux which remains to be more wisely assigned. The capacity to discriminate on matters of charity is rare, and it cannot be expected, until the way is clearly pointed out and

fixed, that the due assistance to each department of institutions will be given in any just proportion.

If, however, the plan of assessment shall be rejected, and the opposition to it may be powerful, I could hope to see a system of liberal support to so beneficent a purpose, voluntarily undertaken and perseveringly supported. That support, to be efficacious, must result from an acknowledged, thorough, and unequivocal conviction of the propriety of the measure in question, publicly seen and felt ; it must be accompanied by a general resolution, that proceeds from right reason, to establish the only permanent and likely means to forward the plan. Looking at the immense fortunes of even the middling class of citizens, at the extensive opulence of this great city at large, the wonder and admiration of surrounding empires, it appears a duty which every person would readily

propose, to be assessed according to the magnificence of the house he inhabits, and the extent of his means, provided the demand is properly made out ; it may be said of us, as of ancient Rome, that our citizens are princes, and their houses palaces. That appears to be an equitable parish tax, which is levied on the rent of houses, but probably in this case it would be more applicable to tax for the number of labourers and servants. When we read of the sumptuous entertainments, in which nearly all endeavour to vie with each other—when we see the splendour of equipages in the public rides, and the sums lavished on dress and the decoration of the person, we must no longer hesitate to ask for what it would be only wholesome in most individuals to spare—when we hear of the immense profits of establishments around us, it is but justice to require a sum proportionably great, considering too, that a

contribution from such a quarter, would go to relieve the artisans and manufacturers employed in it, and their families. On the whole, I look to a system of a more just administration towards the sick poor ; I look to its being established on a clear and settled principle, well defined, and actively supported.

But here, on reverting to all that I have advanced, I feel again the impotence of my situation ; my inexperience on some points may have been the cause of errors into which I have been led, more particularly, perhaps, from a general earnestness to review every part of the subject ;—but I trust they will not purposely be brought to point against the general question. All human opinions are weak and unstable, even when they appear to their author least exceptionable.

velut silvis, ubi passim

Palantes error certo de tramite pellet,

*Ille sinistrosum, hic dextrosum abit; unus utrique
error.*

I have now, my Lord, attempted to develop all that I have to offer with a view to suggest the propriety of a reform in the present medical treatment of the diseased poor throughout this city. I am aware of the disadvantages under which I labour, in presenting a rapid outline, traced in this manner, and with the defects inseparable from the circumstances that attend it.

If, however, I have succeeded in recommending amid the scattered moments of leisure from a laborious profession, the foregoing propositions, I shall believe an impatient anxiety to consult the welfare of the poor to be a sufficient apology for my addressing your Lordship without more deliberation.

I have shortly reviewed the extent and colouring of the body of disease prevalent in our city: I have considered the best mode of administering relief, and, in urging the adoption

of that mode, proposed the plan of public establishments, from which, the most beneficial results may be expected. This being submitted to the attention of the country at large, it has been applied more particularly to the case of the city of London, where the first lines of such an institution, may be found already in the City Dispensary.

The operation of the proposed establishments, we have seen, may be clearly fixed, and shewn to occupy a necessary post in relation to other institutions. A mode of admission to our Dispensary, as it may be termed, has been pointed out, best calculated, it is presumed, to forward the great object we have in view, and it has been provided, that admission should be a matter of desire from superiority in the proffered relief. It was found impossible, consistently with a hope of promoting our purposes, to suggest any other mode of raising funds than that of

taxation, of which, persons will no doubt think differently. But on this, the execution of the whole system hinges—it is the stream which is to set every wheel in motion. If it is a duty to relieve the sick poor, and if adequate relief cannot be supplied without the means of an assessment, it will surely not become us to reject the idea without a very serious and impartial consideration. Whatever abuses may have attended the execution of this measure formerly, and whatever prejudices may follow the proposal, they ought not, unless it can be shewn that they are inseparable from the plan, to be cited on this occasion. To argue against a matter from the abuse of it, is both illogical and unjust.

In submitting these views, I trust it will be believed that my motives are, as I am conscious, pure and liberal ; I hesitate while I embark them in this public manner, but a convic-

tion of the importance of the objects to which they are directed, as it impresses my mind, leads to a hope, that, by eliciting opinions of far greater value, they may in their consequences become useful.

I have the honor to be,

My Lord, with due respect,

Your Lordship's obedient humble servant,

JAMES AMOS, JUN.

DEVONSHIRE-SQUARE,

17 JUNE, 1809.

APPENDIX.

IT was my wish to have noted here such statements and particulars, founded on actual documents, as might have enabled me to strike some estimate of expence attending the plan of relief which has now been discussed. Considering the data to which we should be obliged to resort, the records of separate unconnected institutions, it must be seen, that had they been more admissible in themselves, or generally more succinct and applicable, they would not go far to enable us to form a very precise idea on the subject.

Reasonings so founded, appear to me to be somewhat vague, unsettled, and too dependent on particular circumstances, to be of any general application. If in any of the steps of these

data there has been a temporary interruption, as in the case of the City Dispensary, or even if in one statement it appears that some expences have been accidentally, and yet not improperly, larger than those of others, the force of these together is in some respects weakened, and our reliance must be rather withheld. The variation of the parts, however trifling, is somewhat unsatisfactory in a view of the whole, and I confess I prefer to embrace a more general notion here, not mutilated or distracted by precedents that appear doubtful: this would concern only the proposed measure itself, springing from a persuasion that a general dispensary may be, in itself, a most economical institution: One example, compared with an hospital, would be striking, and this might furnish an idea of the expence, as tolerably accurate, perhaps, as the nature of the case admits; —but no sinister construction is wished to be

hinted at in this remark ; it is obvious that hospitals must be expensive establishments, and that it is necessary to support them in full operation : they supply particular relief, but a dispensary too, forms the essential part of a comprehensive plan, and ought to be supported in its measures of *general* relief. I have pointed out, in some of the foregoing pages, what appear to me to be the distinguishing characteristics of dispensaries and hospitals, and I endeavoured to shew that each has a respective duty which it should be enabled to fulfil. On this subject, I have the pleasure of quoting the words of an able and diligent friend of the poor, who introduces a slight view of the comparative expence, upon which his experience must enable him to speak with considerable justness.

“ The foundation and support of the many medical establishments for the benefit of the diseased poor, not only in the metropolis, but

throughout the kingdom, reflects the highest honor on the national character. This has long been acknowledged, and it could not fail to be highly gratifying to the public, who contribute so largely towards their support, to have a statement published, annually, of the receipts and disbursements of each institution, with an account of the benefits derived from them to the diseased poor. I do not think that this desirable object is sufficiently attained by the committees of a few charities circulating a report of the finances of the institutions over which they preside, among their own members or subscribers. The object in view would, I conceive, be best attained by means of some periodical work, where the reports should be recorded and referred to, by which the advantage of each charity to the *diseased poor* would be made evident, and a liberal public would, in a few years, be enabled to form a correct

judgment as to what kind of charitable institutions is best entitled to their munificence.

The frequent, and in some instances successful, attempts to depreciate the utility of dispensaries, have led to these remarks; and when it is known that for an annual sum of two thousand pounds, upwards of nine thousand of the diseased poor are annually admitted and attended in three of these institutions in London, (those persons being visited at their own houses, who are too ill to go to the charity) it must be confessed that dispensaries are somewhat more than “*so many hot-beds calculated to rear and cherish their plants*, for the public service.*”

It is not my intention at present to analyze the motives which probably gave rise to the above and many similar observations, it being sufficient to record the fact; neither do I

* The medical officers.

mean to advance any thing that should militate in the least against the many truly valuable public hospitals ; but only to observe, that the great benefit derived by each individual inhabitant of these asylums, prevents its being extended to the numbers requiring aid, their establishment not being of sufficient magnitude to lodge and feed all the diseased poor ; nor would it be sound policy to extend their benefits so far ; it being proved, by the above statement, that nine thousand patients are attended annually, in three dispensaries, for a sum not more than adequate to the maintenance of four hundred and seventy in an hospital."

Extract from the minutes of the proceedings of the Committee of the City Dispensary, at their monthly meeting, 2d October, 1806.

“THE Committee having considered the liberal donation of two hundred pounds, granted by the CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF LONDON in aid of the funds of this institution, the following resolutions were moved by JAMES AMOS, Esq. Treasurer.

RESOLVED, That the grateful thanks of the Governors of the City Dispensary be conveyed to the right honourable the Lord Mayor, the Aldermen, and Common Council of the City of London, for their very liberal donation of two hundred pounds, in aid of the funds of this Institution.

RESOLVED, That the Governors of the City

Dispensary, impressed with a high sense of the countenance and marked support which the institution has received from the CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF LONDON, propose, as a duty incumbent on them, to extend its benefits as far as the funds will permit, for the relief of the sick and necessitous poor of this city.

RESOLVED, That the Alderman and Deputies of each ward be privileged, accordingly, to recommend patients to this institution from their respective wards, under the same regulations as life governors.

RESOLVED, That a copy of these resolutions, together with a sufficient number of printed letters of recommendation, and copies of the regulations of the City Dispensary, be delivered to the Aldermen and Deputies.

Which being seconded, were severally put by the Chairman, and carried in the affirmative, unanimously."

In observing the terms of this extract, and remarking, also, the contributions of churchwardens of parishes, which have been met, in nearly the same manner, by the Governors of the Institution, we catch a glimpse of an approach to some part of the general measure which I have attempted to propose ; but, as in the course of my attempt, the propriety of it has, I trust, been seen, so the impossibility of fulfilling it entirely, unless the admission is left more open, has been also discovered. It is well known, that in consequence of the admission of patients being so dependent and shackled, the idea of a more general extension of its benefits to the wards at large, has not, to any considerable degree, been realized.

The Aldermen and others, could not stimulate, in this case, what it is difficult to keep in free and constant action. But no reflection can therefore issue upon the judgment of the

mover, or of the enlightened committee, the approvers of these resolutions ; whatever their general views may have been, they were, on this occasion, necessarily restricted by the constitution and forms of the dispensary.

I have somewhere adverted to the hope of excluding the practice and the impositions of the lowest class of medical men ; the two following extracts from reports to the same committee, will corroborate some of my assertions.

“The only fatal case mentioned in this report was femoral Hernia, and for which the patient would have had the operation performed, and, in all probability, have recovered, but from the undue interference of a medical practitioner, whose pretended capability of reducing the Hernia, without operating, amused the patient and her friends, till she sunk into the arms of death, leaving a young family and

a disconsolate husband to lament the loss of a parent and wife no more.”

“A poor woman, residing in Norton Falgate, was seized with retention of urine, a neighbouring surgeon and apothecary being called in, he continued daily to administer medicines till she became in the most imminent danger; another professional man was sent for, who drew off the water, which consequently afforded her instant relief, but he charged a guinea for the few minutes’ attendance, and one shilling for a small vial of castor oil :—had it not been for the humanity of a servant girl who was related to the unfortunate sufferer, in advancing the money, the demand could not have been complied with, as, evidently, if the whole of the possessions had been exposed to sale, they would not have produced the sum required.

Application was then made to the dispensary, and by a repetition of the operation for a few

days only, she was completely restored to the superintendence of her numerous offspring, from whom she was on the brink of being snatched for ever.” (Signed)

JOHN TAUNTON.

I annex a communication, for which I am indebted to a friend, surgeon to the City Dispensary, wherein a late deplorable instance of extortion, of neglect, and of inhumanity, to a poor patient is recorded—one, however, of many stated to me in conversation, and of others innumerable, daily occurring in all quarters, for want of proper dispensaries.

It adds to the abundant evidence to shew that, without a dispensary, the poor are left to a state of inconceivable doubt, of hazard, and exposure, no less from the neglect and avarice of some eminent medical men, than from the

extortion and incapacity of the lower walks of the profession.

Like those extensive docks for the reception of our mercantile shipping, the contemplation of which prepares the mind for any thing that enterprize and commercial opulence can effect, dispensaries may be said rather to have been urgently called for than to be started experimentally, combining, like them, every advantage of superior kind, with security against either plunder or extortion.



TO JAMES AMOS, jun. Esq.

Dear Sir,

Should the following case come within the views of your publication on the utility of public dispensaries, and the necessity of supporting them, it is much at your service:

Mrs. ———, of about 30 years of age, now

under my care for a disease in the bone of the leg, which will, in all probability, require amputation, (and even the success attending that operation is doubtful, from the debilitated state of the body,) some time since applied to a professional man of this town who for many years has been conspicuous for his apparent humanity, by opening his doors for the admission of poor diseased persons who could not give him a fee. He examined this poor woman, who, from her own account, (so far as I am able to judge,) was labouring under a chronic rheumatism, and observed that nothing but a salivation could be of the least service to her.—On her assenting, he replied, that even that could not be effected unless she gave him two guineas, which sum could not be raised but by the aid of the pawnbroker; the few things which were valuable to herself and her husband being deposited there, the demanded fee was paid. Mercury was either prescribed or

given, and by its application, a most violent salivation was caused. In this state, although she was unable to be removed from her bed for weeks, yet, no solicitations made on her part by her friends to this supposed humane surgeon, who had received his fee, could induce him to visit her, as another guinea was not to be obtained.

I am, dear Sir,

Your's truly, &c.

(Signed)

JOHN TAUNTON.

GREVILLE-STREET,

18th Sept. 1809.

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